

# INTRODUCTION

## Cultural Mobility and the Contours of Difference

BRENDA MACDOUGALL, CAROLYN PODRUCHNY,  
*and* NICOLE ST-ONGE

In countless situations in history all over the world, trade between groups has led to sexual encounters and even intermarriage, including dual-heritage offspring. This circumstance became common in the North American fur trade, but this does not mean that Metis people can be found all over North America. Usually, dual-heritage offspring would join either their mothers' or fathers' communities and adopt their heritage and culture. But, in specific situations, when the dual-heritage children begin to intermarry and create families and communities with one another and to develop a distinctive culture based on novel practices—such as a new language, artistic production, or economic activity—and especially when a shared sense of collectivity is expressed, ethnogenesis, or the birth of a new people, occurs. This volume studies just such a situation in the northwestern part of North America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Groups of Metis people emerged on the Great Plains, in the boreal forests, and in the subarctic scrublands when successive generations of dual-heritage children intermarried and created communities. Not all of these communities acted together as a single collectivity or formed kinship ties or even were aware of one another, but a surprising number of them did. Regardless, in this place and time, the emergence of these groups constitutes the birth of a new people.

Having an Indian ancestor does not make one Metis; rather, Metis people emerged in and descended from communities of dual heritage with common interests and goals.

At several conferences from 2004 to 2006, a series of conversations about Metis and fur trade history began between Nicole St-Onge, Carolyn Podruchny, Brenda Macdougall, and Heather Devine. These discussions led to an innovative research collaboration to investigate the nature of Metis identification, shared group consciousness, cultural practices, communication, and mobility in northwestern North America.<sup>1</sup> We had each been conducting research in these areas independently, but we felt that we could more effectively advance Metis and fur trade historical inquiry by coordinating our efforts to understand what becoming and being Metis meant and means in historical and contemporary contexts. Although each of us dealt with different geographies and intellectual spaces, we were mutually intrigued by the nuances in the definitions, geographic contextualizations, economic behaviors, assertions of social and political collectivity, and rights expressed throughout Metis history. Equally intriguing was how the answers to these questions have evaded traditional studies of Metis communities over the past three decades.

After receiving a three-year Aboriginal Research Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada to study the concepts of Metis identity and individual and collective consciousness in historic communities, we initiated our work by hosting two conferences to see whether we could bring together people to hold a focused conversation centered on Metis and fur trade history. Our approach was not new. Thirty years ago, the first conference on the “Métis in North America” was hosted by Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S. H. Brown at the Newberry Library’s D’Arcy McNickle Center for the History of the American Indian<sup>2</sup> in Chicago, Illinois. The subsequent product of that conference was the seminal collection of essays edited by Peterson and Brown, *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America*.<sup>3</sup> Like many researchers engaged in Metis and fur trade scholarship, we were profoundly impacted by that collection. *The New Peoples* has since shaped intellectual discourse at the intersection of Metis and fur trade historiography. It provided the context for understanding various kinds of ethnogenesis across the continent, as the chapters explored diverse interpretive frameworks and theories to explain the psychological and physical diasporas experienced by the Metis throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

and the diversity of Metis community histories and cultures spanning a geography that encompassed the Red River settlement in southern Manitoba, northern Montana, northern Ontario, and northern Alberta.

Perhaps one of *The New Peoples'* biggest contributions to academic discourse was the discussion begun in the introduction by Peterson and Brown of their understanding of and decision whether to use a lowercase or uppercase *m* when spelling "Metis."<sup>4</sup> Intentionally or not, Brown and Peterson introduced a debate that has been a preoccupation of scholars because the decision on how to spell the term is indicative of what type of people they were (and still are) designated by themselves and by outsiders—a race, a culture, or a nation.<sup>5</sup> The lowercase *m* was used inclusively for all mixed-ancestry people, and so the focus was on race, not nationhood. Peterson and Brown proposed that the lowercase *m* would also refer to those people with a sense of cultural distinctiveness but who perhaps did not engage in the same types of national development as was found in western Canada during the nineteenth century. Conversely, the usage of "Metis" was reserved only for those communities that formed a distinct indigenous nation with a shared history, culture, and homeland in western Canada.<sup>6</sup>

Inspired by *The New Peoples*, we hoped to contribute to the development of Metis history by providing a venue for scholars—many of whom previously had few opportunities—to engage in conversations with one another. Our goal was to promote a range of scholarly activity in these areas and to encourage scholars to ask new questions. Our first conference, "Fur Trade and Metis Days," was held at the University of Saskatchewan in 2007 as part of the annual Congress of the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences.<sup>7</sup> This one-day conference brought together a diverse group of graduate students, professors, professional researchers, government representatives, community scholars, and activists as both participants and observers interested in diverse topics, including Metis, voyageurs, trade economies, local histories, and indigenous rights. The enthusiasm with which this conference was met prompted us to host a second conference, "Fur Trade and Metis History: Patterns of Ethnogenesis," at the 2009 congress held at Carleton University.<sup>8</sup> The program was made up of some who had presented at the first conference, some audience members from the first, and newcomers. We witnessed the same level of enthusiasm, innovative research methodologies, intriguing research results, and desire to continue talking about Metis history.

When we originally conceived of the conferences and, subsequently, this collection, we were unsure whether any scholars would want to join our conversation. We were delighted to discover that many currently working in the field were excited to participate, and both the conference papers and the chapters collected for this book required little prompting. Fueled by the findings of other scholars in the field and interested in testing the boundaries of the existing discourse, the editors of this collection were keen to contribute to and expand the discussions about Metis studies.

What emerged was a realization that the intellectual dialogue about the Metis has moved beyond a conversation focused solely on their emergence as a new people. Researchers are now also asking questions centered around a Metis *state of being*, leading to broader discussions about Metis concepts of geography (not only how they used environments, but how they imagined themselves occupying space, giving meaning to place, and developing connections to multiple landscapes), their range of mobility as associated with various trade endeavors, and, finally, how family relationships sat at the center of their collective consciousness and way of being. Although scholars continue to explore and untangle the thorny issue of ethnogenesis, it is clear that they are also turning their attention to questions about who these people became—how they understood and moved about their world and, in turn, how they shaped their consciousness via large networks of families and communities. The emergent consensus among the scholars present in 2009 was that these three elements—geography, mobility, and family—defined Metis culture and society across North America, and that they were pivotal to a Metis worldview and way of life.

By now, the reader will have noticed our stance on spelling Metis. We have chosen to capitalize the *m* but remove the accent over the *e*. We feel that this spelling best reflects the lives and experiences of individuals and communities of people who descended from European fathers and Indian mothers during the fur trade. Our use of the word with an unaccented *e* (rather than *é*) is our effort to show that Metis people should not be considered simply as the descendents of French Canadian voyageurs; we recognize the patrilineal diversity of heritages beyond French Canadian to embrace Orcadian, Scottish, English, and so on. The capitalization of the term points to the existence of a group identification, if not nationhood, that was diverse and not tied solely to the political expressions of nationhood reflected in the resistance to Canadian annexation in

the Red River settlement in present-day Manitoba and Batoche in present-day Saskatchewan. However, because of the complex political ramifications of terminology, we have allowed each of the authors in this collection to determine her or his own way to express the idea of Metis people.

### **Geographies, Migrations, and Families**

One of the key intellectual exercises for scholars in Metis studies has been conceptualizing and articulating how the Metis differ from the maternal and paternal societies from which they emerged. The emphasis has, until now, been on the idea that the Metis blended their material culture to create things like embroidered or beaded frock coats that were made of tanned hide or the Red River cart that was styled after a common European wagon but made with no metal or steel parts so that it could be easily repaired out on the plains. These physical representations of Metis culture certainly point to their creativity in expressing distinctiveness, but such representations do not necessarily get at the essence of what it was to be a people who were neither European nor Indian. Clearly, geography, mobility, and family are all elements found within European and Indian cultures, but we contend that the Metis articulated and lived them differently.

The chapters in this collection illuminate aspects of the form and content of Metis culture<sup>9</sup> and, we hope, begin to formulate some answers to the overarching question of the contours of Metis lives. Although ethno-genesis is obviously the first step in the emergence of a new people, what else is required to transcend biracialism and biculturalism to become distinct, with corporate or even national interests? What are the contours of this new people? By and large, the collected chapters here accept that a new people—however they are defined—emerged in the workings of the fur trade between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. More important, the authors herein strive to analyze and explain how the Metis conceptualized themselves in relation to one another, to outsiders, to their homeland, and to their economy. We offer in this introduction a discussion about the themes that emerge in these essays and an attempt to broaden the conversation further by exploring the contours of Metis culture and nationhood.

Studied together, the three characteristics—an expansive geographic familiarity, tremendous physical and social mobility, and maintenance of

strong family ties across time and space—appear to have evolved as a result of an entrepreneurial spirit in a variety of economic niches associated with the fur trade writ large. The Metis were involved most famously in the large scale, commercial buffalo hunt specific to Plains Metis culture, but they were also involved in other important activities, including trapping and freighting, working on vast transportation networks that operated along waterways and cart trails, taking part in subsistence and commercial hunting and fishing operations, free trading, and performing contract jobs within the fur trade industry, all practiced in a variety of geographies encompassing plains, parklands, woodlands, and the subarctic. All these economic endeavors, and the cultural practices that subsequently emerged from them, contributed to a sense of shared community and contributed to the nationalist sentiment felt by many Metis today.

Mobility emerges as a dominant theme in many of the chapters, but one should not presume that these communities were nomadic. The term “nomad” (and its derivatives) is laden with cultural baggage rooted in a discourse that posits that civilization is founded on agrarianism. Conversely, to be uncivilized is to have no fixed residence or, to be more specific, to “roam” the landscape gathering food. Nomadism often refers to a people or culture whose mobility is perceived as detrimental to their stability as a community. Nomad and settler are both concepts that are a part of an archaic classification system that posits humankind as evolving on a sociocultural scale. The achievement of any society was to move up the evolutionary scale toward civilization. There is, however, an alternative understanding of mobility that warrants some attention here. Hugh Brody’s *The Other Side of Eden: Hunters, Farmers, and the Shaping of the World* explores the idea that the true nomads are, in fact, the settler farmers who were able to uproot themselves and transplant their way of life in new environments.<sup>10</sup> The “agrarian frontier” for millennia was ever expanding because the technology and economy associated with this way of life was such that the people were able to move about easily, looking for new, fertile regions where they could begin anew. Conversely, hunting, fishing, and gathering knowledge is far more site-specific. As such, the technological and cultural adaptation of those who harvest by hunting, fishing, and gathering are regionally or geographically specific traits and consequently not easily relocated unless their practitioners are

prepared to fully transform themselves, including their entire knowledge system.

Brody's ideas about mobility are echoed by cultural theorist Stephen Greenblatt, who argues, "The reality, for most of the past as once again for the present, is more about nomads than natives."<sup>11</sup> In his introduction to *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*, Greenblatt asserts that cultures have never been whole, undamaged, or fixed, but rather mobility, fluidity, and change have been constant elements of human life in virtually all times and places. Like Brody, Greenblatt encourages us to reflect differently both on the idea that cultures belong to place and on the patterns of meaning that humans create for themselves.<sup>12</sup>

There is a tension between mobility and rootedness in Metis communities that can be better articulated if we reflect on the ideas of Brody and Greenblatt, and so, even as we use the term "mobility" here, it needs to be understood as a form of movement that establishes fixed communities. That fixedness, however, never quells their movement. The Metis are neither nomadic nor settled but, rather, are both. The Metis were spread throughout northwestern North America, the Great Lakes region, the Great Plains, along rivers used as major fur trade routes, in the subarctic scrublands, and in the boreal woodlands and parklands, where the physical and economic possibilities of those geographies informed the specific types of social and cultural communities that existed there. In each of these locations, fixed settlements were established, such as Red River, Île-à-la-Crosse, Lac La Biche, Batoche, and Michilimackinac. Inherent in these locations was a form of regional and interregional movement associated with trade. For example, the people of Red River—the largest fixed Metis community—continued to live according to a seasonal cycle predicated on movement, even as some of its residents themselves became rooted in place as merchants, clergy, or small-scale farmers. People came and went from this place to hunt buffalo on the plains, transport produce and goods to St. Paul, Minnesota, or work for a season or two on the northern boat brigades. As people and goods moved in and out of this inland port, they intersected with other fixed and mobile communities in other regions. The result of this fluid pattern of movement was a society that shared knowledge of various regions because its family members came and went with the seasonal cycles. The Metis lived and thrived at the intersection of mobility and fixedness.



There is certainly a relationship between Metis mobility and sense of geographic expanse, both of which were shaped by their economic interests in the fur trade and ideas of homeland, territory, and landscape. Their sense of space transcended ecological zones, but they also had a psychological understanding of their physical space as encompassing a far greater range of geography than what they might occupy in the short term. Thus, farmers on the banks of the Red River believed they could fish in Lake Manitoba or hunt buffalo in Montana because these places were part of their homeland. If they were buffalo hunters by occupation, their geographic worldview encompassed fixed sites across the plains, parklands, and forests that they regularly visited. Between the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the Metis spread out across western and northern Canada and the northwestern United States in various occupations associated with the peltry industry, they shaped for themselves a sense of homeland and connection to the territories where they lived and worked. Like other groups, they named the landscapes they occupied and shaped, and they created stories and songs linked to particular places, all of which rooted them to the new spaces they came to occupy. The physical landscape both shaped and was shaped by the mobility of a people who occupied or traversed these regions.

First Nations and European peoples, like many groups of people across the world, migrated and traveled across land, gaining knowledge of intersecting geographies to various degrees. As a people, the Metis emerged out of the migration (indeed, the mobility) of the French, Scottish, and English. All these nationalities or cultural groups from Europe migrated to North America and necessarily gave up something of who they were to become reborn in their newly adopted homes. These newcomers were not simply immigrating and reproducing their lives, rather they were engaging in a process of adaptation and acculturation to their new environs, becoming “native” to survive and prosper. The means by which they became native was rooted in their ability to produce homes in new landscapes by adapting place names, economies, and political structures that reflected both nostalgia for their old homes and excitement by the invention of new ways of living and being. Across the globe, European migration created new peoples—Afrikaners, Australians, Americans, Canadians, Acadians, Cajuns, Brazilians, and Chileans—in lands new to them. Yet, they remained connected to their European-ness by casting indigenous peoples as the foreigner, the exotic, and the nomad.



The maternal ancestors of the Metis were also mobile, traveling between summer and winter camps and following traditional routes for hunting, fishing, and gathering. When Europeans arrived on their lands, their mobility increased. European newcomers were intent on obtaining natural resources, engaging in trade, convincing indigenous people to convert religion, and, of course, colonizing the land. As a consequence, First Nations people responded to these new forces by adapting economically, culturally, politically, and socially to the expanding fur trade and settler economies, demands for political association and military alliances, and dispossessions. In some instances, they were reborn as new peoples, going so far as to adopt new tribal names, establish new lineages, and develop new lifestyles, even as others were able to hold onto their identities and adapt to a new space. For instance, the Crow, one of the most powerful Plains peoples of the nineteenth century, emerged as a new tribe. Once Hidatsa, a people from the woodlands ecology south of the Great Lakes, those who became the Crow migrated to the Plains in the seventeenth century. The Crow became Plains Indians after a prophetic vision received by their first chief, No Vitals, in which he was told to go west to high mountains and plant the seeds of a sacred tobacco plant. No Vitals and a group of fellow Hidatsa moved west until they found the place in his vision and planted those seeds. These Hidatsa became the Crow, a new tribe unaffiliated with any others. They developed an equestrian warrior culture that repelled everyone from their new homeland, which they believed was a sacred gift from the Creator for them alone, and they did so with a ferocity that overpowered other tribes.<sup>13</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, the Creek were removed from Georgia, Alabama, and Florida in the mid-nineteenth century and, despite the violence of their forced diaspora, managed to maintain themselves as Creek by adapting their religious institutions and beliefs to the Indian territories (now the state of Oklahoma). In short, the Creek became indigenous to Oklahoma.<sup>14</sup> A transformation halfway between the Crow and Creek experience was that of the Cree, some of whom turned from being subarctic, largely pedestrian, and boat-oriented woodlands peoples into a Plains equestrian society similar to that of the Crow. However, for the Cree who did move and adapt to new spaces, their decisions were based on range of economic factors, including optimizing their position in the trade economy, rather than religious prophecy.<sup>15</sup> The Plains Cree separated from the Swampy and Rock Cree, moved away from the

shores of Hudson Bay and the woodlands and parklands of western Canada, and emerged, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, as a Plains people and a new type of Cree. This reinvention required adaptation to a new ecological zone, fully and completely, to not only survive but thrive. In each instance, these groups left behind territories and families and lost those connections and shared histories while simultaneously building new histories and family connections in their new homeland.

We must ask, however, what made the Metis different from other cultures around the world, which, according to Greenblatt, were necessarily shaped by mobility and cultural mixing. What, in particular, made the Metis different from their neighbors? It has long been argued that the Metis were a distinct North American people because they were mixed or biracial. Yet we know that other New World people have a history of biracialism because of their long history of contact and alliance building, dating to the wars of imperial conquest and fur trade economy. Historically, Indians intermarried with white traders and settlers, and, although some of their progeny became Metis, many more remained Indian. Many Acadians have ancestors who were Mi'kmaq yet identified historically as a distinct French North American society and did not claim to be Metis or even Indian. Certainly, the Metis, like many others, were shaped by the cultural mixing of such vastly divergent peoples from different parts of the globe, but, just as certainly, that alone did not make a people Metis. Instead, we suggest that the Metis were distinct because their mobility and sense of space were much more extensive, both in terms of influence and sheer ecological or geographic reach. The Metis world spanned the better part of a continent, and specific communities continuously transcended ecological zones. The Metis of the subarctic and Great Plains both made extensive use of parkland zones, just as the woodlands Metis around the Great Lakes easily made a transition to Red River. The connections between these diverse landscapes have shaped Metis notions of homeland and, indeed, their ideas of territoriality.

The link holding all of this together—mobility and geography—is found in the Metis conceptualization of family. Like many other societies throughout the world, the Metis created for themselves a system of extended family relationships within fixed communities and across these vast distances because of their tremendous mobility. Looking at subarctic Metis communities, Richard Slobodin argued that a widespread feature

of Metis family and social life was an emphasis on family surnames as a means of inspiring and maintaining social and cultural unity. He attributed this particular cultural characteristic to the vastness of the region in which they lived, their relatively small population, and the range of economic activities in which they participated.<sup>16</sup> Within a generation or two, the Metis developed a complex genealogical structure and shared knowledge by emphasizing those surnames as a key aspect of their identity.

A wide range of family-based Metis studies have explored the centrality of family in Metis culture and history, but few studies have linked it to these notions of mobility and geographical expanse. Family studies have tended to focus on specific communities but rarely have looked at families within a regional configuration or across multiple and diverse regions.<sup>17</sup> They have focused on particular individuals or specific families but have not placed them within a matrix of community, cultural, or national behaviors common to all Metis people across a variety of geographies, even though few scholars would disagree that they were part of a highly mobile population. We could turn to the histories of other cultural groups that are characterized by the same types of mobility (either voluntary or because of racism-fueled diasporas) and sense of geography, but that comparative approach has not been very satisfying. For instance, Jewish history is replete with stories of various diasporas from a variety of regions, but they have nonetheless maintained a Jewish culture and identity across time and space. One of the means by which they have been able to perpetuate Jewish culture is through an emphasis on endogamy. The marital practice of Jew marrying Jew has been critical to the perpetuation of the faith and culture.<sup>18</sup> The Roma (Gypsies) have likewise had a history of movement and sociocultural exclusion from the communities and nations in which they reside, which has resulted in violent persecution and dislocation similar to that experienced by the Jews. Like Jews, they have maintained a tradition of inwardness and closing themselves off to others to protect and nurture their communities.<sup>19</sup>

The Metis, conversely, had no such tradition of inwardness and no explicit ideology or theology that emphasized endogamy. They were the products of population movements and maintained themselves in family or kinship networks that were both inward- and outward-looking. Although one could look at the Metis historically and see definite examples of endogamy taking precedence over exogamy, there was an inherent tension in those marital practices. The notion of building alliances

through marriage was a mainstay of Metis social custom, which was then balanced against endogamous marital arrangements that supported the development of independent and distinct Metis communities. Overarching social norms within this vast and dispersed Metis world were the products of family values and a vast kinship matrix, both of which were informed by local economies dependent on the possibilities and constraints of mercantile capital. Family, relatedness, kinship—whatever the preferred term—is the basic building block in all human societies, and, of course, the idea of establishing family networks that inform political, economic, and social decision making is a principle found in other societies. Colin Calloway highlighted great similarities in Highland Scots and aboriginal families and clan structures, notably that, despite very real social and cultural differences, these peoples *recognized* each other.<sup>20</sup> Family is perhaps the best way to explain this human impulse to create connections, for the notion of family—and its offspring, clan, or tribe—is a way to show how relatedness was central to a variety of people. Family was the easiest means for people to establish other forms of alliances beyond the political, military, and economic.

Although the Metis differed from other groups, they were not monolithic. Although they shared the characteristics of kinship, mobility, and territoriality, there were distinctions between Metis communities based on where they lived, the types of work in which they engaged, and the religion they practiced. We take to heart Greenblatt's advice to patiently chart specific instances of culture mobility in great detail rather than construct grand new narratives.<sup>21</sup> We encourage scholars to study the variations and nuances proposed by the chapters in this collection to grasp the larger "Metis whole." The chapters here present case studies of a people who made physical mobility, economic entrepreneurship, and social and cultural exchange through family the cornerstones of their identity. The Metis were woven together by a mobility that bridged many human and physical geographies and by their kinship ties that bound the far-flung and dispersed human elements into a coherent functioning whole.

## The Chapters

This collection of chapters covers many overlapping themes, both specific and broad. The chapters at the beginning and end of the volume embrace large conceptual issues, with earlier chapters examining ethnogenesis

and later chapters engaging with contemporary legal and historiographical questions, whereas the chapters in the middle are more focused on particular conceptual, analytical, and geographic considerations. The geographic organization of the chapters tends to run from east to west. Those chapters that touch on like themes, such as women and language, were placed side by side. The book opens with Jacqueline Peterson's exploration of the terms of identification, questioning whether the distinction she and Brown drew in 1985 between "Métis" and "metis" is still useful today, and a reexamination of whether or not ethnogenesis of Metis people occurred in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Great Lakes region.

The subsequent three chapters look at the structures of Metis identification at its emergence. Focusing on the northern prairies, parkland, and subarctic to the west of Hudson Bay and the Great Lakes, Nicole St-Onge and Carolyn Podruchny use the metaphor of a spider's web to suggest that the architecture of Metis culture was made up of extended kin networks in the fur trade and of mobility, both over great distances and in socioeconomic terms. They argue that firm Metis identifications and self-consciousness only crystallized in moments when external threats forced group mobilization. Nevertheless, a sense of community, however mobile individuals and families may have been, permeated and linked together the inhabitants of the fur trade world. Gerhard J. Ens examines one of these moments of crystallization, the 1816 Battle of Seven Oaks, in which Red River Metis took up arms against the forces of Governor Robert Semple, who prohibited the Metis from selling pemmican until all the food needs of the Red River colonists had been met. Ens argues that even though many claim this battle was the birth of the Metis Nation, the conflict was not, at the time, an overt expression of nationalism but, rather, a catalyst that awakened the Metis' sense of collectively held rights. In the following chapter, Philip D. Wolfart echoes St-Onge and Podruchny in highlighting mobility as a key characteristic of Metis ethnicity, asserting that Metis cultural identity cannot be understood as emerging in a fixed place, like a nation-state, but must be perceived in an aspatially organized world. In this type of geographic organization of human populations, connections among mobile individuals, families, and communities do not conform to conventional mapping styles.

The next group of chapters examines different expressions of Metis ethnicity, paying particular attention to language. Étienne Rivard's study

of the linkages between geography and oral histories among the nineteenth-century Metis on the prairies resonates with Wolfart's and with St-Onge and Podruchny's ideas about mobility. He shows us how narratives illuminate how some Metis understood their sense of place and collective consciousness and how place names reveal oral geographies or the relationship between orality and territoriality. Peter Bakker explores how the creation of new languages often accompanies the development of new ethnic identities, arguing that emerging languages are shaped by specific sociohistoric contexts and operate dialectically with one another. Bakker asserts that truly mixed languages, such as Michif, are very rare, that they do not necessarily accompany mixed cultures, and that it is difficult to say which comes first, the birth of a people or the new language.

Turning to a specific location with distinct politics, Victor Lytwyn describes the story of the Fort Frances Metis, the first Metis community to treat with the Canadian government (Treaty 3, signed in 1875) and be recognized as a distinct aboriginal nation. Although the Canadian government later denied their existence, these Metis considered themselves distinct from their Indian and European neighbors. Moving farther south and west, to Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, Lucy Eldersveld Murphy draws our attention to Metis women. Her chapter traces how mixed-blood fur trade families lost autonomy, status, and land when the United States took over the region, and how women in these families used their networks, their roles as "public mothers," and family residence patterns to resist dispossession. Diane P. Payment continues the discussion about the central role played by Metis women in family networks, economic activities, and political movements. Payment focuses on the life of Marie Fisher Gaudet in the Northwest Territories, who assisted her husband's career with her economic skills, language proficiencies, and family networks and also taught her children Metis cultural practices in the face of growing community ambivalence about Metis heritage.

Michel Hogue takes us back south of the forty-ninth parallel to examine how shifting criteria for tribal membership and reservation access in the United States acted as a barometer for the changes in borderland communities. Metis migrated to northern Montana in the late 1860s and early 1870s, following the buffalo herds west, and intermarried with local Assiniboin and Gros Ventre peoples, creating multiethnic and fluid communities close to the Canada–United States border. These communities

suffered a hardening of racialized identities and exclusion of Metis as a category. Northwest of the Great Plains, just beyond the Rockies, a group project by Mike Evans, Jean Barman, Gabrielle Legault, Erin Dolmage, and Geoff Appleby studies the origins of Metis ethnogenesis in New Caledonia among families connected to Red River. Like other contributors to this collection, these authors demonstrate how the historic Metis Nation is best understood as a mobile and expanding network, rather than fixed to a neatly delineated homeland. Further north, Daniel J. Blumlo shows us that descendents of Russian fur traders and Aleut, Alutiiq, and Tlingit women in what would become Alaska did not form distinct communities and identities apart from their parents' cultures. The Russian American Company strove to assimilate this Creole workforce by controlling social status, marriages, and upbringing and by undermining indigenous matrilineal traditions. Even though Creole people acted as go-betweens and cultural brokers in this fur trade, much like the Metis, Creoles came to identify themselves primarily as either Russians or members of an Indian group, depending on their location and life experience. These chapters show the extent to which local contexts mattered in the creation of Metis communities and identities.

The last two chapters in the collection take us to the present day by examining how scholarship about Metis peoples has evolved in court cases and historiography. Chris Andersen analyzes how Metis identification is expressed in Canadian legal proceedings, cautioning us that courts do not share the same nuanced and complex appreciation for ambiguities held by scholars, and that they manufacture fixed definitions of Metis identity. He identifies Metis historical use and occupancy as being lost in translation in the 2003 *Powley* ruling. Focusing on the problem of how to define Metis communities while recognizing the mobility of individuals and families, he explores how use and occupancy modalities of thought interrupt and restructure politically oriented understandings of territory. In the final chapter, Brenda Macdougall steps back to reflect generally on the question of ambivalence in Metis identification and historiography. She argues that rather than focus on Metis who celebrate a long-lost Indian grandmother to claim a Metis identity today, or on those Metis families who tried to hide their identities in the twentieth century to avoid racism and discrimination, we should instead examine the cultural ambivalence of scholars who have studied the Metis, who defy simple racial or cultural categorization, and their ontological systems.



## Conclusion

Movement, geographic expanse, and family defined the elements and contours of Metis culture, community, and, eventually, nationhood. They became who they are—a people called Metis—not in spite of their mobility but because of it. Mobility allowed them to exploit a wide variety of economic and geographic niches in varied geographical regions along the sinews of the fur trade while permitting the maintenance and reproduction of far-flung ties of kinship. The Metis became a collectivity because they knew who they were and outsiders recognized them as such. Their mobility and spatial confidence allowed them to survive physically, spiritually, and intellectually. The chapters in this collection span a wide geographic area in northwestern North America, from Montana to Alaska, from British Columbia to the Great Lakes, and consider questions from the beginnings of the Metis in the Great Lakes region in the late seventeenth century to contemporary issues about defining Metis people and rights in Canadian law. They deal with questions as diverse as how the U.S. Library of Congress categorizes Metis scholarship, the nuances in Michif verbs, and the role of women in maintaining economic and social networks. The thread that holds all these chapters together is their focus on land, family, and mobility; this focus provides a way to better understand who the Metis were, who they became, and who they are today.

## Notes

1. Our first conversation occurred in Winnipeg at the annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, and another conversation was initiated because of our mutual participation in the spring of 2006 at the Ninth North American Fur Trade Conference and the Twelfth Rupert's Land Colloquium held in St. Louis, Missouri.
2. This is now called the D'Arcy McNickle Center for American Indian and Indigenous Studies.
3. Peterson and Brown, "Introduction," 7–8.
4. Peterson and Brown (*ibid.*) cited the Métis National Council's statement to the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations in 1984 as informing their decision. According to this statement, the lowercase *m* reflected the original French usage of the term as a racial designation for anyone of mixed ancestry who evolved into a distinct indigenous people throughout North America. The University of Manitoba Press insisted on lowercase *m* throughout the

volume for editorial consistency, despite the editors' reservations (personal communication from Jennifer S. H. Brown). The decision they made was largely driven by a desire for editorial and political consistency, but it incited a debate on terminology that has not yet been quelled. The issues of terminology and how best to apply the appropriate designations continue to perplex us today.

5. For more extensive discussions of terminology, see Peterson in this volume; Brown, "Noms et metaphors"; Brown, "Linguistic Solitudes in the Fur Trade"; Foster, "Origins of the Mixed Bloods in the Canadian West"; and Foster, "Métis."

6. Peterson and Brown, "Introduction," 5–7.

7. This conference was held at the Diefenbaker Canada Centre on the University of Saskatchewan campus and was cosponsored by the Canadian Historical Association and Canadian Indigenous/Native Studies Association.

8. This second conference was sponsored by the Canadian Historical Association (the Canadian Indigenous/Native Studies Association did not participate in the congress that year) and spanned two full days, with Jennifer S. H. Brown providing a keynote address.

9. None of the essays here engages directly with Metis material culture. For an excellent recent study of Metis clothing and decorative arts, see Racette, "Sewing Ourselves Together."

10. Brody, *Other Side of Eden*, 7.

11. Greenblatt, "Cultural Mobility," 6.

12. The authors in Greenblatt's volume explore the sixteenth-century Portuguese colony in India, German narratives of American slavery, tourism and migration in contemporary China, Islamic performativity traced over centuries, and Goethe's reading of world literature.

13. Lear, *Radical Hope*, explores the psychological impact of this initial transformation and what it then meant to this tribe when they were confined by the American government to reservations.

14. Ethbridge, *Creek Indians and their World*.

15. See Milloy, *Plains Cree*; and Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree*. Similarly, some Ojibwe moved west from the woodlands of the Great Lakes to become the Plains Ojibwe. See Peers, *Ojibwa of Western Canada*.

16. Slobodin, *Metis of the Mackenzie District*, 70–71, 163–64.

17. Devine, *People Who Own Themselves*, and Macdougall, *One of the Family*, are two exceptions.

18. These are recurring themes in most histories, both scholarly and popular, of people of Jewish descent. See, e.g., Johnson, *History of the Jews*.

19. Crowe, *History of the Gypsies*.

20. Calloway, *White People, Indians and Highlanders*. Although she does not discuss family per se, Nancy Shoemaker, *Strange Likeness*, explores the remarkable commonalities among Indians in eastern America and northwestern Europeans in the eighteenth century.

21. Greenblatt, "Cultural Mobility," 16.

## Works Cited

- Brody, Hugh. *The Other Side of Eden: Hunters, Farmers, and the Shaping of the World*. Vancouver, BC: Douglas and McIntyre, 2000.
- Brown, Jennifer S. H. "Linguistic Solitudes in the Fur Trade: Some Changing Social Categories and Their Implications." In *Old Trails and New Directions: Proceedings of the Third North American Fur Trade Conference*, edited by Arthur J. Ray and Carol M. Judd, 147–59. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1980.
- . "Noms et métaphores dans l'historiographie métisse: anciennes catégories et nouvelles perspectives." *Recherches Amerindiennes au Quebec* 37, nos. 2–3 (2007): 7–14.
- Calloway, Colin. *White People, Indians and Highlanders: Tribal Peoples and Colonial Encounters in Scotland and America*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Crowe, David M. *A History of the Gypsies in Eastern Europe and Russia*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994.
- Devine, Heather. *The People Who Own Themselves: Aboriginal Ethnogenesis in a Canadian Family, 1660–1900*. Calgary, AB: University of Calgary Press, 2004.
- Ethbridge, Robbie. *The Creek Indians and Their World*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2003.
- Foster, John Elgin. "The Métis: The People and the Term." In *The Western Métis: Profiles of a People*, edited by Patrick C. Douaud, 21–30. Regina, SK: Canadian Plains Research Centre, University of Regina, 2007.
- . "The Origins of the Mixed Bloods in the Canadian West." In *Essays on Western History in Honor of Lewis Gwynne Thomas*, edited by Lewis H. Thomas, 71–80. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1976.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. "Cultural Mobility: An Introduction." In *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, with Ines Zupanov, Reinhard Meyer-Kalkus, Heike Paul, and Pal Nyiri, 1–23. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Johnson, Paul. *A History of the Jews*. New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1987.
- Lear, Jonathan. *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.
- Macdougall, Brenda. *One of the Family: Metis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan*. Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2010.
- Mandelbaum, David G. *The Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historical and Comparative Study*. Regina, SK: Canadian Plains Research Centre, University of Regina, 1978.
- Milloy, John S. *The Plains Cree: Trade, Diplomacy and War, 1780 to 1870*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1988.
- Peers, Laura. *The Ojibwa of Western Canada, 1780 to 1870*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1994.
- Peterson, Jacqueline, and Jennifer S. H. Brown. "Introduction." In *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America*, edited by Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S. H. Brown, 3–16. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985.

- Racette, Sherry Farrell. "Sewing Ourselves Together: Clothing, Decorative Arts and the Expression of Metis and Half Breed Identity." PhD thesis, University of Manitoba, 2004.
- Shoemaker, Nancy. *A Strange Likeness: Becoming Red and White in Eighteenth-Century North America*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Slobodin, Richard. *Metis of the Mackenzie District*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Research Centre for Anthropology, 1966.